



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## STUDENT-PRODUCED NEWSLETTER: SERVING NOVICE JOURNALISTS AND THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

Palo Alto College takes pride in being the heart of San Antonio's South Side community. Likewise, students in COMM 2311: News Gathering and Writing I, and COMM 2305: Editing, Layout and Headlines, take pride in "The Pulse," a student-produced newsletter in touch with the heartbeat of the Palo Alto College community.

"The Pulse," established fall 1998, gives students hands-on reporting, writing, and editing experience. A large number of communications students plan to enter the field of public relations and need to learn how to think and write like journalists—the gatekeepers of public relations information.

"The Pulse" is printed at midterm and at semester's end in a 12-page, 8.5"x11" (three 11"x17" pages folded in half) newsletter format. Story ideas are generated by students in COMM 2311 and COMM 2305, as well as students in COMM 1307: Introduction to Mass Communications. Classes are scheduled back-to-back to facilitate students' face-to-face interaction. In addition, e-mail requests go out to the entire campus, soliciting noteworthy information about programs, students, faculty, and staff.

Students in COMM 2305 evaluate all of the story ideas, dummy out the issue, assign stories to reporters, and pair themselves with reporters. A list of assigned stories is distributed, along with phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the stories' reporters and editors.

The lab is equipped with 14 G3 Macintosh computers, an HP Laserjet 5000N printer, a Sony Mavica digital camera, and a Microtek ScanMaker 4 scanner. Lab software includes Microsoft Office 98, QuarkXpress, Adobe Photoshop, Dreamweaver, and Mac Art Explosion with 525,000 images.

The first story is assigned to COMM 2311 students in the second week of a 15-week semester. In weeks three, four, and five, students are expected to complete the

necessary news-gathering for their stories, which includes interviewing activities sources. In week six, students spend the entire week in class, working on their drafts. The day drafts are due, students bring in a single copy. They exchange stories and spend 15 minutes editing their peers' work. Stories are exchanged a second time, and students spend another 15 minutes editing that work. Students then have the remainder of the class period to revise their own stories before turning in two copies, one for their editor and one for their professor.

Students in COMM 2305 review their reporter's story, using a standardized form that evaluates the story's lead, organization, information, sources, writing, and mechanics, and return it to the professor with three possible headlines by noon the day before the class meets again.

In week seven, students in COMM 2311 spend the entire week in class revising their stories. The day the final draft is due, students again bring in a single copy of their story, exchange stories, and edit their peers' work before revising their own stories and turning in two copies. Students in COMM 2305 then edit their reporter's work and return it to the professor with the story's proposed headline by noon the day before the class meets again.

In the first class of week eight, students in COMM 2311 make the final revision of their story, save it in drop folder (created for the issue) on hard drive, and turn in one printed copy. Students in COMM 2305 pull up their reporter's work from the drop folder, make any additional changes, and format the story (single-space, 9-point, Palatino type, justified alignment) before opening up the desktop publishing software to lay out their pages.

At the beginning of the fall semester, one side of an 11"x17" page is printed with a selected PMS color to "punch up" the masthead and a calendar area. These shells are then overprinted by the campus copy center with a regular copy machine. One thousand issues are printed each run.

Money is budgeted to fund "The Pulse" each year. Since funding limits the number of issues that can be



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printed, students in COMM 2305 convert the printed pages to web pages, where distribution is unlimited and an archive of past issues is available.

On the day “The Pulse” is printed, students gather in the cafeteria to collate, fold, staple, and prepare to distribute the issue to the campus community. This creates a sense of excitement and accomplishment among the student reporters and editors. On this day students turn in three well-developed story ideas for the final issue of the semester. No rest for the weary!

The second half of the semester flows much like the first. Students in COMM 2311 receive their second story assignment in week nine. They have two weeks, rather than three, to complete their news gathering. In week 12, students spend the entire week writing the drafts of their stories. In week 13, they revise their stories during class. In week 14, final revisions are made during the week’s first class period in COMM 2311, and students in COMM 2305 lay out the issue. Students in both classes help collate, fold, staple, and distribute the issue during the week’s final class period, and students in COMM 2305 convert the printed issue to a web issue during the final week of the semester.

Students take great pride in their work, and they build a “clip” (clippings) file of professional quality, useful in their future searches for employment and internships. They learn to work on deadlines and as a team.

Semester after semester, students say they enjoy the practical, hands-on focus of both courses. “The Pulse” provides a great service to everyone in the Palo Alto community—students, professors, staff, and administrators. A counselor wrote: “Wow, what an issue! And I really mean it. I learned more from reading the March issue of ‘The Pulse’ than serving on all my committees.”

Moreover, working on “The Pulse” is a tremendous “commuter school” antidote. Being on staff promotes bonding and friendship among reporters and editors. Students leave class with lifetime friends and a better idea of what the real world holds.

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[Syllabi for the classes may be downloaded at: <http://www.accd.edu/pac/english/Hpage/index.htm>]

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*Suanne D. Roueche, Editor*  
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